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MANNED ORBITING LABORATORY
BACKGROUND BRIEFING

ATTRIBUTABLE TO DEFENSE OFFICIALS

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1200 to 1253 hours

Pentagon Building
Washington, D.C.

MODERATOR: Good morning, gentlemen. The briefing today is a backgrounder with attribution to Defense Officials, or a Defense Official, if you so prefer.

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Gentlemen, you've heard the President's announcement on MOL and the purpose here is to answer any questions that I may be able to answer for you. As you know, the President announced the purpose of the program, and I might go over those again with you, which are, first, to learn more about what man is able to do in space and how that ability can be used for military purposes; to develop technology and equipment which will help advance manned and unmanned space flights; and to experiment with the technology and equipment as it's developed.

The program includes some unmanned tests and five manned tests and the first manned test should begin in the latter part of 1968. The unmanned tests may be one or two which will precede that and will be preceded for the purposes of developing equipment and primarily to insure the safety of the man and the reliability of the equipment.

QUESTION: Well, the President said the United States remains pledged not to use space for weapons of mass destruction and that space should be used for peaceful purposes only. How does the Air Force justify its mission then of the military use of space under that Directive?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: The United Nations resolution which was sponsored by the United States, and agreed to by the United Nations, says that we will not use space for weapons of destruction. We're supporting that fully, as you know, as the President said. We don't think it makes any kind of sense to do so and we are--but we have many parts of military programs which are not--which are in support of the safety of the country, which do not involve--do not involve destructive elements, and the military program which we would be sponsoring in this would be in support of those peaceful intents. A military program, because it's a military program, does not mean it's aggressive.

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QUESTION: Giving you a 41-foot canister there, laboratory section.

QUESTION: Now while we have the diagram, the 1.5 billion that the President mentioned this morning, could you just make some rough breaks? Douglas has the laboratory, GE the Experiments, a certain amount goes to McDonnell for the Gemini, I guess--

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: Does that include any booster money?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: That includes booster money, yes. It includes everything that (inaudible).

QUESTION: Will you tell us roughly how much will go to Douglas in the laboratory portion?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I really can't tell you how that would break out. Of course, the substantial period, the substantial cost as you all know in boosters.

QUESTION: Will you use any of the developmental models of Titan III-C; either put up your unmanned MOLs or your manned? You have 12--

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: We would not use any R&D (inaudible --coughing) to put up the manned, because it's necessary that the booster be man-rated before we put a man on top of it. However, it might be used for some of the preliminary experiments which would be involved in the unmanned shots.

QUESTION: (inaudible) its full size of 12 developmental flights?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: They still plan that way, whatever the number is.

QUESTION: The last two are currently reserved for MOL possibilities aren't they? Would the first two that you mentioned be unmanned then?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: They could well be.

QUESTION: Will you have any West Coast launches of this?

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DEFENSE OFFICIAL: We plan launches from both coasts.

QUESTION: With manned? Are these all manned 30-day flights?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: At the present time they are all planned at 30-day flights, but of course you understand that one of the purposes of the NASA program is to determine how well man does in prolonged orbit in space and we would of course make use of that information in developing the precise flight plans.

There's somebody way in the back.

QUESTION: Where would these flights be controlled from, Houston?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: No, they would be controlled by the existing Air Force network.

QUESTION: Where is that?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: National ranges--national range operations.

QUESTION: They'll be controlled from the point of launch then?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Yes, essentially.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Vandenberg or the Cape.

QUESTION: What's the purpose of a polar orbit that you plan?

(Laughter)

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I didn't say we were planning Polar orbits.

QUESTION: Are you going to try some anyway from Vandenberg?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Yeah. We plan high-inclination orbits and--well, I would say that at least what the Russians use would be reasonable.

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QUESTION: From Vandenberg?

QUESTION: 90--

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: 65.

QUESTION: You mean that? From Vandenberg--

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: 65.

QUESTION: Did you say at least?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: At least.

QUESTION: Now, what about the most?

(Laughter)

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: The most is 90. You can't get higher than that.

(Laughter)

QUESTION: What altitude do you have to reach to get your 30-day --

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: In connection with the earlier question, which would be the requirements, we feel that the purposes of the MOL which is to explore, and develop and understand some natural phenomena, should investigate all the areas of natural phenomena, and we have to have high-inclination orbits for that purpose.

QUESTION: What would be the orbital altitude, roughly, for this--

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: It would be--it has not been set and it would not be set for a while but it would be in the same general range in which the Gemini launches have been made.

QUESTION: Well, you can't leave it up there for months in this same general range, can you?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: It--there is a decay, as you well know, and they have to be higher than a certain altitude to stay up.

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QUESTION: Are you going to use exclusively military launch crews for these or are they going to be mixed or what?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: I just don't know.

QUESTION: Is there such an experiment--

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: There is--excuse me. I don't mean to brush this off, but this situation varies as the program goes along as you well know, and it could conceivably vary here. In any case, the one thing we would be sure to do since the safety of the man is involved, we would have the very best capability, whether it was contractor or military there, for the launching.

QUESTION: Has Defense intelligence assessed the Russian reaction to manned military laboratory overflying the Soviet Union, and if so, how might that affect your plans?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Well, I can't answer that question directly. I assume that the Russians don't object since they overfly the United States.

QUESTION: Could I ask two or three questions about what the 30 days in space will be like, will they continually go back and forth between the Gemini capsule and the lab vehicle?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: No, it wouldn't be--they might and they could, but it wouldn't ordinarily--you wouldn't ordinarily expect them. The Gemini is really set up to remain--to be kept in what you might say a standby status, and the men would do their work and activity in here (indicating on chart), they'd return to this vehicle for reentry. Now if there was a safety problem of some sort the Gemini is so designed so that individuals could go back in here and stay in there for a certain length of time, for quite a number of hours to come back into the pre-scribed location. So they--

QUESTION: They can live in the lab vehicle area?

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Yes, they would. In a shirtsleeve environment, and that means you take off the space suit.

QUESTION: But you would reenter the space suit to reenter the atmosphere.

DEFENSE OFFICIAL: Yes.